

BARGAINING BULLETIN



In this issue of the StFXAUT Bargaining Bulletin, we wish to inform you of the latest status of our ongoing negotiations toward the *Third Collective Agreement*. In the two weeks since our September 19th General Meeting, there has been a deterioration in negotiations with respect to the Administration's desire to make progress and to honour commitments made. Their recent pattern of not keeping their word, combined with a cavalier attitude toward honouring signed agreements, is an ill-advised bargaining strategy that breeds distrust and erodes the capacity for cooperative negotiations.

Prior to the official start of negotiations in July, both the StFXAUT and Administration reached an agreement on a Bargaining Protocol. A copy of this protocol is available on the StFXAUT website. Amongst other things, this protocol bound both parties to table all proposals, including our respective financial offers, by the end of September. This date was over one month later than what the StFXAUT wanted, but we conceded to this extension based on the Administration's argument that the student enrolment figures would be necessary prior to tabling their

financial proposals. Both parties further verbally agreed that any and all proposed changes to the language of the *Collective Agreement* (excluding the salary scales) would in fact be tabled by the last scheduled meeting in August.

The first commitment that was dishonoured by the Administration resulted in a delay in tabling their changes to both Financial Exigency and Program Redundancy. Although they specifically indicated that we could expect these items on August 17th (the last day of scheduled meetings in August), they tabled them on the very last day allowable under our Protocol, September 28th. No reason was given as to why a full six weeks would elapse before we received their proposed changes.

The second and more problematic commitment that was dishonoured by the Administration resulted in them not tabling any financial offer before the end of September (nor to date), despite having received a proposed compensation package by the StFXAUT within the timeline to which we both agreed. The reason we received from the Administration was twofold: 1) they no longer had a mandate from the Board of Governors to table a multi-year proposal and needed a new mandate, and 2) the current budget

forecast is worse than projected. With respect to the first excuse, we feel that if they have no mandate now, they never did, for there is no new information available about years two or three of the new *Collective Agreement*. Student enrollment, tuition levels, government funding or even who will be in government are all unknown but need to be planned for regardless, and all within the context of the *Collective Agreement* that we will sign. At the most recent meeting of the Board on September 17th, a discussion pertaining to a mandate for their negotiating team neither was on the agenda nor occurred, and the Administration denied that any specific Board action or decision was urgent, pending, or even necessary. If the Board is, in fact, not mobilizing to give thoughtful consideration to our proposals, then why the delay?

With respect to the second excuse, it seems unimaginable to us that the University finds itself, in September, in some new financial situation that it did not predict when negotiations began less than three months earlier. Government funding levels and tuition are all in place, and according to the AVP on Sept. 20th, student enrolment is down only around 65 students, in keeping with historical patterns of enrolment. The Administration has long been warning us about demographic challenges that will place downward pressure on enrolment, so surely they did not forecast ever-increasing numbers of students for this fiscal year. In sum, we feel this story is part of an overall 'shock and awe' narrative that the Administration uses to deny us favourable working

conditions. We do not dispute the reality that the University does face some real financial challenges, but the root cause of these challenges do not stem from the membership of the StFXAUT, and a solution to these challenges will not be found in the *Third Collective Agreement*. The real story to be told about the financial situation of the University must shift the burden of responsibility onto the prioritization and decision-making of the Administration; the diminishment of the academic mission of the University in favour of other pursuits that fail to deliver the promised revenue; specific acts of mismanagement that, amongst other things, have resulted in approximately 160 residence vacancies this year alone; and the emerging story about swelling managerial ranks and the disproportionate compensation paid to Administrators. We will expand upon these and other arguments in forthcoming issues of the Bargaining Bulletin. The key point to be made is that the Administration has the managerial responsibility for decision-making (and we are frequently reminded of this), yet they seek to make others accountable for solutions to the problems of their own making. They seem willing to speak about shared responsibilities, not when it comes to decision making, but only when it comes to bearing the burden of problem-solving.

At the last meeting of the negotiating teams in September, we were also presented with their tally of the financial impact of all our proposals. Once again, we witnessed a tendency to grossly exaggerate our ask. For example, we tabled course relief for Chairs and Coordinators of smaller departments to correct the

problem created by the Administration in the *Second Collective Agreement*. Their interpretation of this proposal is that a part-time instructor would be required to teach one course given as relief for every single Chair or Coordinator. It is a laughable proposition that highlights a degree of ignorance with respect to actual cost drivers in this University. Indeed, the financial impact of this small proposal is likely zero, not their hyper-inflated figure of \$120,000. Then there is the uniquely discriminatory case of the denial of benefits to the StFXAUT member who is married to another member, that is, is not enrolled in the benefits plan to allow for the coordination of benefits but is instead deemed a dependent of the other. Our simple proposal to correct this situation was costed by the Administration at over \$163,000 despite only about a dozen members adversely affected by this exclusion and the full cost of benefits being only about \$1,700 per member per year. Their failure to question such a high cost increment should make us all worried about their capacity to effectively manage University finances. Another lesson: be highly suspicious of any announcement by the Administration pertaining to the cost of our proposals!

Furthermore, it has become increasingly obvious to us that the University has no specific financial offer, but rather their approach will be to simply respond critically to our proposals. What is lacking is an innovative response to revenue generation and cost management for the University, and their failure to table an attractive retirement incentive, despite repeated invitations and reminders from the StFXAUT negotiating team to do so,

is a case in point. Also, if they indeed have no financial offer to present, it seems deceptive to use this excuse as rationale for extending the deadline to table proposals to the end of September.

With respect to where we are now, we have three meetings scheduled for the first two weeks of October. We have yet to see any reason to schedule meetings beyond this timeframe until we see meaningful progress on the numerous proposals on the table to which the Administration has yet to respond. It is time for them to put some energy into thoughtful responses to our interests. Individual members of the Association will be spreading out to communicate with as many of you as possible to ensure you are aware of the significance of the proposals that we have tabled and to highlight how our mandate is inclusive, member-driven, substantive, reasonable, and principled. If you have any doubts about this, please do ask. Additional Bargaining Bulletins will also be distributed to develop a counter-narrative to the Administration's tired and misleading story that Academic Staff are responsible for StFX becoming 'an expensive model.' Finally, another General Meeting of the StFXAUT is scheduled for October 9th to provide continued transparent communications to our members, answer questions, and bolster the solidarity necessary for us to maintain our strength at the bargaining table. Your support of our efforts is both crucial and appreciated.